

9th Sydney Spring and the Marienberg Awards

Someone ought to give Roger Woodward and his troops an award. Despite almost negligible funding, Woodward managed to work his magic again this year inspiring performers to reduce or waive their fees and encouraging volunteers to perform organisational miracles. No series of concerts in Australia does this much for new Australian music both locally and internationally. Activities traditionally span the full month of September to provide a rich confection of new, very new and extremely new music linked to exceptionally interesting pre-concert talks and the less-well-known Spring Academy of New Music.

Through a cooperative arrangement and a strong link to radio station ABC Classic FM, all concerts are recorded, many being broadcast live. Thus tens of thousands of other Australians share the same experience as the audiences of three or four hundred which pack the ABC's Ultimo studio. Of particular significance for our overseas image is the range of Sydney Spring CDs which are well-respected in the international market.

Another link is with the University of Sydney Music Department which hosts the Spring Academy of New Music. This educational component of Sydney Spring is highly valued by many music students—particularly composers. I, for one, consider that Sydney Spring has contributed as much to my studies as a full semester of lectures.

Part of the Academy offering was a 4-hour workshop with the ensemble Sprung Percussion. New works from aspiring local and invited interstate composers were rehearsed and analysed from a performance point of view by the members of the ensemble assisted by David Lumsdaine—one of Australia's leading expatriate composers who lives and works in the UK.

But for many, the high point of Spring was the six Marienberg awards. Marienberg is a local boutique winery which has faithfully supported the concerts and competition since 1990 with

cash prizes for winners, specially embossed boxed dozens for prize winners, and further generous donations of wine. Guy Bowen of Hill International Wines, the distributor of Marienberg, presented the prizes on the evening of the final concert.

This year's winners were:

Award for an outstanding performance by a solo performer—Marshall McGuire for his performance of Donatoni's *Marches and Chantal*.

Award for an outstanding performance by duo, trio, quartet or ensemble—Stephanie McCallum and Robert Curry for their performance of James Dillon's *black/nebulae*.

Award for the most outstanding performance of the 1998 Sydney Spring Festival of New Music—Brian Buggy for his direction of Anne Boyd's *Dreams of the Earth*.

Award for an original Australian composition—Ian Shanahan for *Dimensiones Paradisi*.

Award for an outstanding Australian composition—shared by Carlo Giacco for *Entity* and Damien Ricketson for *Ptolemy's Onion*.

Award for the most outstanding original Australian composition of the 1998 Sydney Spring Festival of New Music—Andrew Ford for *Tattoo*.

Not a review:

Because it's impossible to review three-and-a-half dozen pieces of music in this short space here instead are some impressions—

In Andrew Ford's *Tattoo* for 12 timpani and four pianos, there were thirteen timpani. Why? I wonder if anyone else noticed. Didn't matter really. I was reminded of the inexpressible sadness I felt encountering a lone piper leading a funeral in Scotland.

John Cage's *First Construction* surprised me. Expecting at least an acre of awkward silence, I found percussion bashed about so traditionally it felt like a Sunday-school chorus.

Waiting for Anne Boyd's *Dreams*



(l to r) Anne Boyd, Ralph Lane, and Peter Sculthorpe

of the Earth my two-year-old sat quietly, awed and overwhelmed by the Opera House concert hall. As the opening ppp organ notes broke the silence, she turned to me with a radiant smile and said, "Angel music."

James Dillon's music. A year ago I met him and couldn't understand the point of *New Complexity*. This year *black/nebulae* suddenly made sense and *The Book of Elements* affected me as profoundly as a Colin Wilson "peak experience" in his *The Outsider*.

George Lentz gave an erudite pre-concert talk explaining how prepared silences can differ. And the books inside the prepared Steinway do matter—Heironymus Bosch, astronomy, Chinese Calligraphy. Middle D tuned simultaneously a quarter-tone sharp and a quarter-tone flat for "Caeli enarrant..." V opens my ears wide.

Jane Stanley's *Whistling Kite* on Yellow Water moved from being a student piece I first heard battling against rattling air-conditioning at the Conservatorium to gain stature on a "real concert" program. For Stanley it's arriving somewhere she thought she'd never get only to discover that this is the bottom of a new ladder.

The strength of audiences support

at concerts rises for percussion. Perhaps it's the link to jazz. I wonder what the effect would be if every program had a percussion component. Are marimbas and cymbals the gateways to [new musical] perception?

Rosalind Halton programs the two Louis (Couperin & Andriessen) back to back and argues strongly that harpsichords and keyless flutes are meant for new music.

Ian Shanahan has Kathleen Gallagher doing flute experiments again after a pre-concert talk which involves pi, religious arcana, new age numerology, loud jazz and a recording of his own virtuosic microtonal recorder music. Is there anyone else out there who didn't throw their squeaker away at the end of primary school?

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Marienberg, has extended its most generous support to the Tenth Sydney Spring, in 1999. The year 2000 Spring will be a celebration of all Australian music from the whole of the century. Next year will see Charles Rosen, The Song Company, Marshall MacGuire, Ian Shanahan and Iannis Xenakis as some of the more prominent names in the programme.